

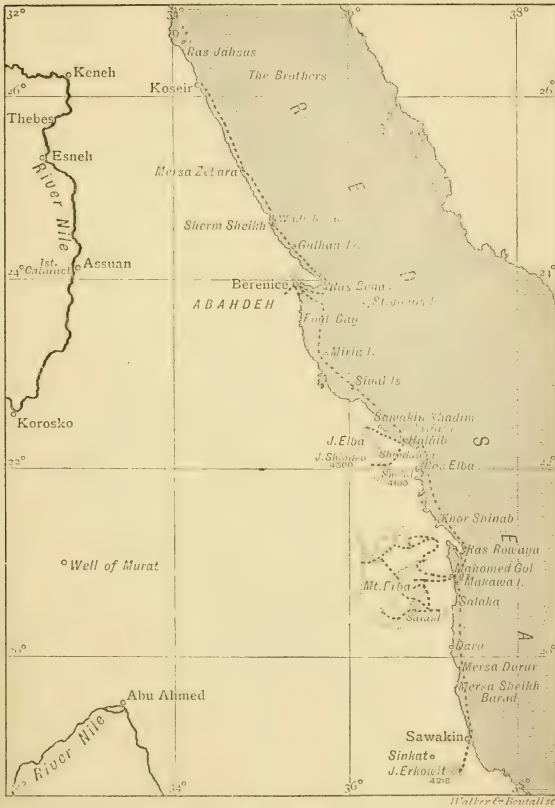
XVII.—*Notes on the Birds of the Western Coast of the Red Sea.* By ALFRED J. CHOLMLEY, F.Z.S.

IN the autumn of 1895 I was invited by Mr. Theodore Bent to join him in an expedition to the west coast of the Red Sea, his intention being in the first place to explore the ruins of the ancient town of Berenice, and, if possible, to go inland from there; but if this could not be done, to coast down the Red Sea and land as circumstances permitted. We left England on the 1st of December, 1895, and, after a stay of a few days in Cairo, we went to Suez to hire a boat of some kind, but found it rather difficult to decide among those that were offered to us. We at last chose a dhow of about 80 tons, named 'Tyceer,' which we got for £30 per month, with an Arab captain and a crew of 17 Arabs. She was a quaint-looking vessel, with low bows and very high stern, decked over for about 15 feet in the bows, and the same in the stern, where two cabins were constructed of rough boards under the stern-deck, for our accommodation. The boat was infested with many splendid specimens of the cockroach, and other insects even more unpleasant. Our reis and crew, however, all proved most excellent fellows, and, as a rule, seemed most anxious to please.

Our party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Bent, Lieut. Smyth of the Queen's Bays, and myself; Mouthes Simos, a Greek, as cook; Annibale Piacentini, a Maltese; De Sostén, a Spaniard, as interpreter and guide; and two servants.

We left Suez the day after Christmas Day, and sailed all the first night down the Gulf of Suez, but afterwards, when we got among the coral-reefs of the Red Sea, we always anchored at night, sometimes behind a coral-reef, and sometimes in one of the small land-locked harbours abounding on the west coast. The first time we anchored was behind a reef called Sheikh Ganem, just at the entrance of the Gulf of Suez; and there, on a small patch of coral, were an Osprey, a large Grey-backed Gull, a Skua Gull, and three sorts of Sandpipers. A Dunlin was shot, but the others flew

away before they could be identified. There were also numbers of red and blue crabs, with bright red legs, running



MR. CHOLMLEY'S ROUTE ON THE WESTERN COAST OF THE RED SEA.

about. On another small sandbank there were tracks which were probably those of a wild cat, and an old nest of some large bird was on a pile of stones only a few feet above the sea.

After four days' sailing we reached Koscir, a very dilapidated-looking place, much decayed since the opening of the Suez Canal, as there were many houses, used formerly as consulates and merchants' dwellings, all more or less in a ruinous state. The trade of the place must have been very large, as it is said that 3000 camels used to arrive every day, and it was a point from which pilgrims sailed for Mecca.

On our way to Berenice we anchored one night in a small bay, where one of our party shot two Ospreys, which fell into the water, and were promptly taken down by some large fishes, probably sharks, which abound in these seas. Another night we stopped just inside Ras Benas, on the point of which dwells a holy man in a wretched hut, surrounded by desert, with no sign of life or vegetation. Our crew took him, what no doubt he considered, a very handsome present of tallow candles. This night a Booby (*Sula fiber*) came on board to roost, and was captured.

The Bay of Berenice, most properly called "Foul Bay" on the charts, is full of coral-reefs, and is a most dangerous place to navigate, many of the reefs being only just below the surface of the water. Two or three of the crew usually stood in the bows when navigation became difficult, and sometimes the captain climbed to the mast-head, whence he directed our course.

We arrived at Berenice on the 3rd of January. As we came into the bay, two dhows which were anchored there promptly departed; and we could see a few Arabs driving off their camels and sheep, seemingly in a great fright. The slave-trade is still carried on along this coast, the numerous land-locked bays making it singularly adapted for the purpose, while a run of a few hours across the Red Sea to the eastern side places the traders and their goods in safety. The country all round Berenice is nothing but sandy and stony desert, extending for about ten miles to a range of high rocky mountains with a singularly jagged outline. The desert has a few bushes of tamarisk and mesembryanthemum scattered sparsely about. There were small troops of White Egrets and Spoonbills wading in the shallow water on the edge

of the bay, with large flocks of Curlews. There were also flocks of Dotterel and a large Ringed Plover and several kinds of Sandpipers to be seen, but all so excessively shy that it was quite impossible to get a shot at them. I was much struck by the wildness of nearly all the birds during our expedition, although it was impossible they could ever have been disturbed. The only places where they were at all tame was at Halaib and Mahomed Gol, where the Egrets would only just move a few yards out of the way, and various kinds of Sandpipers ran about almost among the Arab huts. It was very amusing to watch the Egrets, only a few yards off, dash into a shoal of little fishes, scattering them in every direction. Bird-life was somewhat scarce in the desert round Berenice; there were two kinds of Wheatears (*Saxicola deserti* and *S. monacha*), a few Desert-Larks, and a small flock or two of the Cream-coloured Courser. There were a few gazelles about, and some small hares with immensely long ears. Before we had been many hours here, some white Egyptian Vultures appeared, and two pairs of the Brown-necked Raven. The so-called Temple of Berenice is really a tomb with several chambers, built of a very white crumbling stone; there are hieroglyphics on some of the walls, of which I got some good photographs.

After leaving Berenice, we sailed down inside the coral-reefs and anchored the first night behind Siyal Island—a low sandy island two or three miles long, 100 yards or so in width, only about 3 feet above the sea, and covered with two kinds of mesembryanthemum. A holy man lived here once, and his grave is at one end of the island. Many of these islands seem to be inhabited by hermits, dependent for everything on the pearl-fishers and Arabs, who supply them with food and water. There were three pairs of Ospreys here and two kinds of Sandpipers, of which I got one (*Calidris arenaria*). We caught some large, brilliantly-coloured fish while at anchor, and a queer-looking shark about 6 feet long. On January 14th we got to Halaib, which consists of a row of thatched huts and an octagon fort, whitewashed at one end. From here we first went to Sawakin Khadim, about

15 miles north of Halaib, where there is the site of an ancient town. We stayed here a few days exploring the site, but found nothing of value or of much interest except quantities of broken glass bracelets, of which there were so many that in the course of two hours I picked up pieces of 260 different patterns. While here we got a few Sand-Grouse, two young Shrikes (*Lanius fallax*), several specimens of the Stone-Curlew, and an Egyptian Goatsucker. One day while near the sea I saw two black Ducks, which I am sure were Velvet Scoters—the large yellow beak and black plumage showed distinctly, but they were too far off for a shot. There was no fresh water here, but the remains of three tanks, one of which was nearly perfect. We were much troubled here by a sandstorm, which lasted two days. The wind blew a gale from the south-west, and the sand drifted through every hole in the tents, and it was quite impossible to do any collecting.

The day after our return to Halaib, we hired camels and journeyed up to Shelal, about 20 miles inland, where we camped at the foot of the mountain of that name. It is about 4100 feet high, very rugged and bare, except in the gorges, which were full of creepers and vegetation of all sorts, while the talus at the foot was covered with mimosa-trees growing among loose stones, all rounded and water-worn, which made walking excessively hard. There were Turtle-Doves here (*Turtur roseogriseus*) and numbers of Grey Shrikes, one of which used to perch on a mimosa just over the tent and sing. The first night we were here two leopards paid us a visit, attracted, no doubt, by a freshly-killed sheep. They were the only beasts of prey we came across during the whole of our expedition from Suez to Sawakin.

The Abyssinian Sun-bird (*Cinnyris habessinica*) was found here. This was the only Sun-bird met with on the western coast of the Red Sea, and it was common everywhere. There was a good run of water here in one of the gorges about a mile away from our camp; we were informed that it lasted only four months in the year, though there must be some water during the dry season, or the birds could not exist.

On leaving Halaib we found a strong wind and big sea running from the north, and our dhow rolled very heavily. After a good run of about 60 miles, we put into a small land-locked harbour called Khor Shinab, the entrance to which could not have been more than about 80 yards wide, between coral-reefs, on which the sea was breaking heavily. The country round Khor Shinab is an absolute desert, being covered with sea-shells and pieces of coral up to the foot of the hills.

We arrived at Mahomed Gol on February 6th, and, after staying a day or two to arrange matters with the sheikhs, started with 14 camels on our journey to the Erba Mountains. After leaving Mahomed Gol, our way lay for some days through valleys like the dry beds of rivers, between low, barren, and rocky hills. Some of these valleys had curious lines of igneous rock running down and across them. In one of the valleys we came across some small herds of wild asses. These, the Arabs say, are escaped animals that have bred in the hills, which is probably true, as they seem larger than the true wild ass. At Haddai we camped at the mouth of a deep gorge with steep cliffs on both sides. At the other end of this there was a pool of water with a small stream running into it, where we got two kinds of Turtle-Doves (*Turtur roseogriseus* and *T. senegalensis*) and some blue Rock-Pigeons. Here a small brown Finch with darker stripes on the head was common, and *Sylvia blanfordi* was frequently seen. There were also flocks of the small Bengalee and some of the Abyssinian Sun-birds. The reddish-brown Sand-Partridge, which Mr. Ogilvie Grant has named *Ammoperdix cholmleyi*, was only seen singly or in pairs, but its shrill call was often heard among the rocks. In the evening, just as it got dark, scores of the Sand-Grouse came down to drink; these were all of the same kind, with black bars on the head.

The next few days of our journey took us through a most desolate country, consisting of valleys full of sand with a few bunches of dead grass and bushes, and spurs of low hills covered with loose shale and slate. In one of the valleys were the traces of an ancient gold-mine, with hundreds of well-

worn crushing-stones scattered about, and the remains of stone-built houses and furnaces. There were hardly any birds in this region—a few black-and-white Wheatears, and a small bird, black with a white tail, which was very wild, and which I failed to get. I think, from its habit, it was a *Saxicola*.

As we got near to Mount Erba the country improved much; there were large bushes of arrack, ten feet high and several yards across, with bright green fleshy leaves, with a very foxy smell, and trees of different kinds, in the valleys. This country was about 3000 feet above the sea, and the nights were very cold. Wadi Kour was very fine; Mount Erba, 8000 feet high, was right in front, looking pale pinkish-purple in the sunlight. We passed through narrow valleys with high rocky cliffs on each side, in some places covered with huge stones, where we had to dismount and lead the camels. Our destination was a place called Sellalat, where we had been promised by Sheikh Ali Hamet that we should find an oasis with large trees, green grass, and running water. When we arrived there we found no trees, no grass, and no running water—nothing but a waste of drifting sand and a well of dirty water. It was a great disappointment. We were taken to see some “antiquas,” about eight miles from Sellalat, which consisted of some large rocks covered with very ancient drawings of camels, elephants, and gazelles, mixed up with religious symbols. After leaving this we passed round the end of the Erba range and got into Wadi Ambaya and Wadi Kukut on the east side of the mountain. In Kukut there was a pair of the Abyssinian Raven, looking very quaint with their broad wings and short tails; they were not nearly so tame as the Brown-necked Raven that we had met with before.

We stayed only three days in these two wadis. It was very hot there, the valleys being narrow with high rocks at the sides, which got so hot that they could scarcely be touched with the bare hand. There was a good deal of both bird and insect life, the water-supply lasting the whole year, and much might have been done here with more time.

This was practically the end of our expedition. On the whole we had very little time for collecting, as on the journey through the Erba Mountains, which occupied 23 days, we were 16 days travelling on camels. During this part of the journey we had two expresses sent after us by the Governor of Suakin, ordering us to return at once, as there were rumours of Dervish raids. We therefore returned to Mahomed Gol and sailed direct to Suakin, nearly getting wrecked again on the way.

We never saw any Hawks during the expedition, and only one or two Eagles in the distance.

The temperature on the Red Sea was very pleasant, generally from 70° to 80° in the shade; there was usually a fresh breeze, and it was always cool at night. In the Erba Mountains the thermometer one night fell to 41°; this was about 3000 feet above the sea-level.

From Suakin we returned to Suez in the Khedivial steamer 'Rahamanich,' a wretchedly slow old tub. While steaming up the Gulf of Suez we passed an immense flock of white Storks, which were crossing the Gulf in a northerly direction, and were just settling for the night on the coast near Tor. There must have been many thousands of them, as they looked like a swarm of bees.

The following is a systematic list of the birds obtained during the expedition. The specimens have been kindly named for me by Mr. Ogilvie Grant.

1. *PANDION HALIAËTUS*.

This Osprey was a very common bird all down the Red Sea.

2. *SYLVIA BLANFORDI*, Seebohm.

Sylvia melanocphala, Blanford (nec Gmel.), Geol. & Zool. Abyss. p. 379 (1870).

Sylvia blanfordi, Seebohm, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. v. p. 29, pl. ii. (1881).

Blanford's Warbler, undoubtedly the most interesting bird met with, has up to the present time been known only from the type specimen—an adult male, collected at Rairo, Abyssinia, in the month of August. This specimen was

obtained by Mr. W. T. Blanford during the British Expedition to Abyssinia, 1867-68, but was then erroneously identified by him with the nearly allied Sardinian Warbler (*S. melanocephala*). I found it not uncommon in some of the valleys of the Erba Mountains, but did not notice it further north than this range of hills. Besides the adult male brought back, I got another specimen, but, unfortunately, had not time to preserve it. It seems a quiet little bird, and may usually be seen perched on the topmost twig of some bush.

3. MYRMECOCICHLA MELANURA (Temm.); Seebohm, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. v. p. 360 (1881).

I shot an example of Temminck's Chat-Robin.

4. SAXICOLA XANTHOPRYMNA, Hempr. & Ehr.; Seebohm, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. v. p. 381 (1881); E. C. Taylor, Ibis, 1896, p. 478.

When Seebohm wrote the fifth volume of the catalogue of birds quoted above, he observed: "There is no example of this very rare Chat in the British Museum"; and his remark still holds good, though sixteen years have elapsed since it was made. Besides the three specimens mentioned by Seebohm, no additional examples had been recorded until February 1896, when Mr. E. C. Taylor obtained an adult bird close to the pyramids of Gizeh, as recorded above, and I found it not uncommon at Ras Rowaya in the Soudan. It was wild and difficult to get near, but I managed to secure a fine adult on the 3rd of February, 1896. The sex was not ascertained, but, judging by the black throat, the bird is probably a male.

5. SAXICOLA DESERTI, Temm.; Seebohm, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. v. p. 383 (1881).

The Desert-Chat was also met with, a male being obtained at Sawakin Khadim on the 19th January, 1896, and a female at the Erba Mountains in the following March.

6. PYCNONOTUS ARSINOË, Hempr. & Ehr.; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. vi. p. 148 (1881).

I shot a specimen of this Bulbul at Wadi Kukut, in the Erba Mountains, in the month of March.

7. *CERCOTRICHAS PODOBE* (P. L. S. Müll.) ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. vii. p. 83 (1883).

The African Ground-Robin was met with on Mount Shelal, on the 29th of January. This specimen, the only one I saw, was very shy. When it caught sight of me it darted down to the ground under a thick bush, and I had to wait some time before it showed itself again. It was very restless, hopping quickly about the bush.

8. *ARGYA ACACIÆ* (Licht.) ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. vii. p. 397 (1883).

An adult of the Nubian Babbler shot at Haddai, on the 12th of February, 1896. Mr. Blanford very rarely saw this bird in Abyssinia, but from what he observed of it, it had precisely the habits and appearance of *A. caudatus* of India. It was not uncommon, as I saw it in pairs and small flocks of five or six, at several places in the Erba Mountains and on the coast, and its note was often to be heard. On being approached, these birds always got to the far side of the bush, and flew close to the ground to another bush a little distance off. The one shot was on the ground when I first saw it, but I could not see what it was feeding on. The skin was tough and thick, and had a very strong smell.

9. *LANIUS FALLAX*, Finsch ; Gadow, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. viii. p. 247, pl. viii. (1883).

An adult of Finsch's Grey Shrike shot at Mount Shelal, on the 29th of January, 1896, has the black band across the bases of the upper mandible well defined, the basal two-thirds of the inner web of the penultimate pair of tail-feathers entirely black, and the secondaries widely tipped and margined on the inner web with white.

A quite young specimen was also procured at Sawakin Khadim on the 19th of January, 1896. It has the general colour of the upper parts dull earthy grey, and the black band across the forehead absent, though the characteristic markings of the adult are clearly shown in the wings and tail.

10. *CINNYRIS HABESSINICA* (Hempr. & Ehr.); Gadow, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. ix. p. 52 (1884).

The Abyssinian Sun-bird was common everywhere.

11. *COTILE OBSOLETA*, Cab.; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. x. p. 111 (1885).

The Pale Crag-Martin was obtained.

12. *EMBERIZA CÆSIA*, Cretzschm.; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xii. p. 535 (1888).

A male of this Bunting was shot in the Erba Mountains in March; the species winters in North-east Africa and Arabia.

13. *UROLONCHA CANTANS* (Gmel.).

Aidemosyne cantans, Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xiii. p. 371 (1890).

This little Weaver-Finch, called by Latham the Warbling Grosbeak, was obtained at Haddai.

14. *AMMOMANES CINCTURA* (Gould); Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xiii. p. 644 (1890).

Though widely distributed—its range extending from the Cape Verd Islands through the deserts of North Africa to Nubia, Arabia, and Persia—the small Desert-Lark is a rare bird in most collections. The peculiar wedge-shaped black mark on the tail and the blackish tips of the primaries render it easily distinguished from other members of the group. We found the species quite common, and obtained an example at Berenice on the 7th January, 1896.

15. *AMMOMANES DESERTI* (Licht.); Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xiii. p. 646 (1890).

The Common Desert-Lark was collected at the Erba Mountains in March.

16. *PYRRHULAUDA MELANAUCHEN* (Cab.); Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xiii. p. 655 (1890).

Two males of the Black-crowned Finch-Lark, which ranges from Nubia and Abyssinia through Arabia and Baluchistan to North-west India, were shot at Berenice on the 6th of January. One of these birds differs from the typical adult

male in having the white spot at the base of the forehead nearly obsolete, though in other respects the two specimens are perfectly similar and appear to be fully adult.

17. *CAPRIMULGUS ÆGYPTIUS*, Licht. ; Hartert, Cat. B. Brit. xvi. p. 562 (1892).

A male shot at Sawakin Khadim on the 18th of January, 1896, is a typical example of the Egyptian Nightjar.

18. *TURTUR ROSEOGRISEUS* (Sundev.) ; Salvad. Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxi. p. 429 (1893).

Very common everywhere.

19. *TURTUR SENEGALENSIS* (Linn.) ; Salvad. Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxi. p. 448 (1893).

Only heard in two places in the Erba Mountains, and most common at Haddai, where I got two.

20. *PTEROCLES CORONATUS*, Licht. ; Ogilvie Grant, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxii. p. 23 (1893).

I shot a female of the Crowned Sand-Grouse at Mahomed Gol on the 5th of February, 1896.

21. *PTEROCLES LICHTENSTEINI*, Temm. ; Ogilvie Grant, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxii. p. 29 (1893).

Numbers of Lichtenstein's Sand-Grouse came to drink just before it got dark at the pool at Haddai.

22. *AMMOPERDIX CHOLMLEYI*, Ogilvie Grant, Game Birds, ii. Appendix, p. 293 (1896).

This species has been already described by Mr. Ogilvie Grant, in his second volume of 'Game Birds,' quoted above, and he has pointed out the differences between it and the typical *A. heyi*, from Arabia, as follows:—"On comparing these and two other African males recently added to the British Museum Collection with the typical examples of *A. heyi* from Arabia, I find that the former differ constantly in having the general colour of the upper parts darker, and in *lacking entirely* the white forehead and lores characteristic of *A. heyi*. Measurements the same as those of *A. heyi*. Adult female similar to the female of *A. heyi*. Range, Egypt and Nubia."

This species was not uncommon at Haddai, and I obtained two males in the Erba Mountains on the 7th of February.

Examples from Egypt, Dendor, in Nubia, and from the neighbourhood of Suakin have recently been added to the National Collection.

23. *ÆDIGNEMUS SCOLOPAX* (S. G. Gm.).

Ædignemus ædignemus, Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 4 (1896).

The Common Stone-Curlew was met with at Sawakin Khadim. Out of several seen, three were shot on the 18th of February, 1896.

24. *CURSORIUS GALLICUS* (J. F. Gm.) ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 34 (1896).

I met with the Cream-coloured Courser, in small numbers, at Berenice on the 7th of January.

25. *STREPSILAS INTERPRES* (Linn.).

Arenaria interpres, Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 92 (1896).

Two Turnstones were shot at Berenice ; they were common all down the coast, and very tame at Halaib and Mahomed Gol, running about the quay in small flocks close to the Arab huts.

26. *HEMATOPUS OSTRALEGUS*, Linn. ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 107 (1896).

A Common Oyster-catcher shot at Halaib on the 23rd of January, 1896.

27. *TOTANUS CALIDRIS* (Linn.) ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 414 (1896).

A Redshank was obtained.

28. *CALIDRIS ARENARIA* (Linn.) ; Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 526 (1896).

Small flocks of Sanderlings were seen at Siyal Island, Red Sea, and two were shot on the 12th of January, 1896.

29. TRINGA ALPINA, Linn.

Pelidna alpina, Sharpe, Cat. B. Brit. Mus. xxiv. p. 602 (1896).

A Dunlin was obtained at Ras Sophia, Red Sea, on the 28th of December, 1895.

30. DEMIEGRETTA GULARIS (Bosc).

This little white Egret was common everywhere; a pair were shot at Berenice.

31. SULA FIBER, Linn.; Heuglin, Orn. Nordost-Afr. iv. p. 1483, & Appendix.

An immature Booby, caught on the dhow, has the white breast and belly of the adult indistinctly showing through the sooty-brown plumage of youth.

XVIII.—*On the Birds of the Philippine Islands.*—Part IX.*
The Islands of Samar and Leite. By W. R. OGILVIE GRANT. *With Field-Notes by JOHN WHITEHEAD.*

(Plates V. & VI.)

ABOUT the middle of May, 1896, Mr. John Whitehead once more left Manila for the island of Samar, to make another collection in place of the one which had been lost off Singapore. There is no really high ground in Samar, and nowhere do the hills attain a greater altitude than about 1500 feet above sea-level. The greater part of the island is covered with a dense and lofty forest, many of the trees being over 240 feet high. Under these circumstances collecting was often a matter of difficulty, for birds, especially large ones, some 80 yards overhead are hardly to be brought down with a charge of shot from any ordinary gun. The climate is hot and damp, and, as might be expected, the rainfall unusually heavy, while the mud, for which the island is

* For Part I. see *Ibis*, 1894, pp. 406-411; Part II. *ibid.* pp. 501-522; Part III. *Ibis*, 1895, pp. 106-117; Part IV. *ibid.* pp. 249-267; Part V. *ibid.* pp. 433-472; Part VI. *Ibis*, 1896, pp. 101-128; Part VII. *ibid.* pp. 457-477; Part VIII. *ibid.* pp. 525-565.